



OHIO RESIDENTIAL BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANT PROGRAM YEAR END REPORT

BroadbandOhio



Department of
Development



BroadbandOhio

In March 2020, the DeWine-Husted Administration announced the creation of BroadbandOhio, an office housed within the Department of Development dedicated to improving access to high-speed internet throughout the state. The office identifies high-priority initiatives and works to expand broadband to Ohioans who have been left without access to the modern economy, education system, and healthcare system due to their lack of high-speed internet connectivity. BroadbandOhio is a resource for local governments and private industry as they undergo their own expansion efforts.

Funding

Governor DeWine signed House Bill 2 into law on May 17, 2021, allocating \$20 million for the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant program to help BroadbandOhio expand high-speed internet access to regions lacking the essential service.

On June 30, 2021, Governor DeWine signed Amended Substitute House Bill 110, the 2022-2023 biennium budget legislation. The signing of this bill allocated \$250 million to BroadbandOhio, earmarking \$2 million for a statewide telehealth project coordinator.

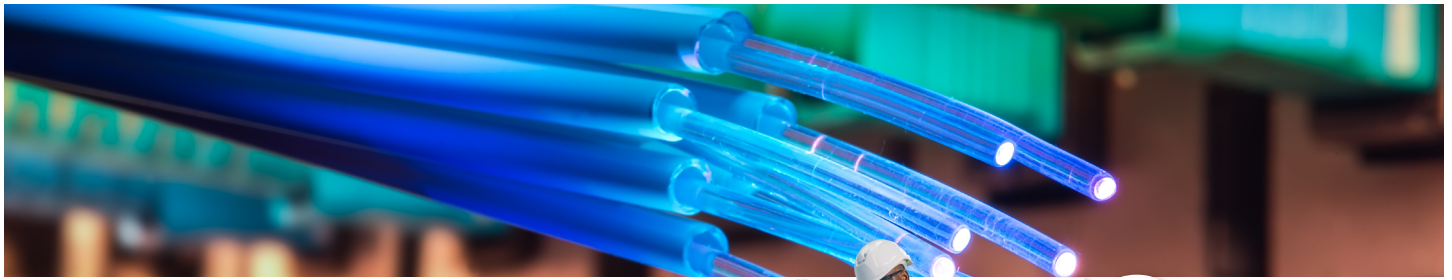
Broadband Expansion Program Authority

House Bill 2 of the 134th General Assembly created the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant program and the overseeing authority, the Broadband Expansion Program Authority. The Ohio Department of Development staffs the authority tasked with overseeing the program, as well as receives and reviews applications. As required by House Bill 2, the Broadband Expansion Program Authority consists of five members:

- *The director of InnovateOhio – Lt. Governor Jon Husted*
- *The director of Development – Lydia Mihalik*
- *One member appointed by the Governor of Ohio – Gregory Sample*
- *One member appointed by the Speaker of the Ohio House – William B. Goodenough*
- *One member appointed by the Ohio Senate President – William P. Coley, II*

The authority hosted its inaugural meeting on Aug. 2, 2021 to review, discuss and approve scoring criteria as well as the application timeframe.

The authority hosted additional meetings throughout 2021 to review received applications, vote on submitted challenges, and approve the scores of all 217 applications. The authority continued to meet throughout 2022 to review the progress of the grant program as well as to hear feedback from providers throughout the state regarding round one of the residential grant program.



The Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program

Program Background

The Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program helps internet service providers offset the cost of expanding into areas lacking service. The grants are designed to assist with the infrastructure costs of the project and help build the networks that will otherwise serve Ohioans who currently cannot participate in the modern economy because of a lack of high-speed internet.

The grants will cover the “broadband funding gap,” which is the difference between the actual cost of building the infrastructure for the network and the amount of money the applicant can afford to spend to build the infrastructure for the network.

Program Creation and Implementation

Between May and August of 2021, BroadbandOhio created the grant program application, application scoring criteria, and application guidebook. Per statute, the application scoring criteria was approved on August 2, 2021. The authority also approved the application timeline, and the scoring criteria was posted for 30 days on the [BroadbandOhio website](#) prior to the opening of the submission period.

The application period for the grant program opened on Sept. 6, 2021, and the BroadbandOhio Office hosted an informational webinar discussing the grant program in depth. BroadbandOhio continued providing technical assistance to potential applicants throughout the application process. This included continuing to update a frequently asked questions document, and engaging in daily calls with providers, local governments, small businesses, and private citizens concerned about the lack of broadband access in their communities.

Prior to the application period closing, BroadbandOhio hosted a webinar on the address challenge process.



The application period closed on Nov. 8, 2021. Forty-nine internet service providers submitted 217 applications. The application proposed project service areas covered 85 counties and the number of households that could have been served with high-speed internet exceeded 600,000. The amount in grant funding requested was \$1,566,568,863.81 with an estimated average cost per household at \$2,544.50.

Application challenges were received by Jan. 12, 2022. BroadbandOhio received 323 challenges for more than 245,000 addresses. The Broadband Expansion Authority met on Feb. 18, 2022, to review the challenges and make initial rulings. Following a 14-day period allowing challenged providers to remedy their applications, the authority cast its final vote on the disposition of challenges and then began scoring applications.

BroadbandOhio staff completed an initial round of scoring with the authority reviewing and approving scores for each application at its March 18, 2022 meeting.

In Q3 of 2022, the authority conducted a hearing to gather information regarding feedback on round one of the residential grant programs. BroadbandOhio staff is currently working through the recommendations and feedback received from the hearing as well as additional feedback received from individual meetings. A separate report with recommended changes to the grant program will be completed and presented in Q1 of 2023.



Awards

At its March 18, 2022 meeting, the Broadband Expansion Authority awarded more than \$232 million in grants to 11 internet service providers. Thirty-three applications impacting 31 counties were awarded to bring affordable, high-speed internet to more than 43,000 homes.



11 internet
service providers



submitted
33
applications



for more than
\$232 million
in grants

In addition to the 33 funded projects, several providers also committed to fund 71 other broadband expansion projects. The additional privately funded committed projects are to be built in two years and serve an additional 31 counties and 52,000 households. In total, BroadbandOhio estimates around 230,000 Ohioans will have improved broadband as a result of round one of the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant program. More information on the awarded grants can be found on the BroadbandOhio website at <https://broadband.ohio.gov/grant-opportunities/grant-opportunities-1/grant-opportunities-1>.

As of October 2022, all 33 awarded grantee agreements have been executed and initial disbursements approved for the grantees to begin their projects. BroadbandOhio has created and implemented a process for which the grantees will submit quarter program and fiscal reports for each project as well as reporting regarding the significant program milestones agreed upon in the grant agreements.

What's Next

On Nov. 5, 2021, Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IIJA), which included funding for broadband infrastructure and accessibility in Ohio. Throughout 2022, BroadbandOhio has been applying for grant funding tied to the IIJA. To date, BroadbandOhio has received \$5 million in funding to create a five-year action plan for the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD). Once the five-year plan is created, additional funding will be released to Ohio to fund infrastructure grant programming over the next five years. It is intended that funds released through the BEAD program will be disbursed using the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant process.

In September 2022, BroadbandOhio submitted grant plans for the US Department of Treasury's Capital Projects Fund, which included additional dollars for the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant program. If approved, the grant plans will support high-quality, affordable broadband services in more communities by funding another round of Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant.

BroadbandOhio

Broadband.Ohio.gov

Ohio

Mike DeWine, Governor
Jon Husted, Lt. Governor

**Department of
Development**

Lydia L. Mihalik, Director